



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **Statement of Response to the Head of Presence in Albania**

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Douglas A. Davidson  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
February 6, 2003

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I too would like to welcome Ambassador Lipponen to the Permanent Council, and to thank him for his comprehensive and most interesting report on the activities of the OSCE Presence in Albania. I would like to start by supporting the reorganization of the Presence as he has outlined it in his report. We believe that it will contribute to the effectiveness of the Presence.

Mr. Chairman, we also believe that Albania's efforts to amend its electoral code in line with the recommendations of ODIHR is one of the most important issues to be addressed. We therefore welcome the visit to Vienna this week of the co-chairs of the Bipartisan Electoral Reform Commission. The creation of that Commission represented an important step, and we congratulate the co-chairs for the work they have achieved so far. Their work, however, will only have meaning if the Commission quickly completes the process of drafting legislation before the end of the Commission's mandate on March 31st. This will require the political will of all parties represented to reach agreement on the few outstanding issues remaining.

More important, it is critical that all parties accept the new electoral code, once in force, and make a political decision to work within this code in the rules in all future elections. All parties need to accept a good electoral system and then respect its operation and its results. Disputes and controversies surrounding elections in Albania – which undermine democracy and political stability – should become a thing of the past.

Mr. Chairman, we also applaud Albania for its development of a National Strategy on Trafficking in Human Beings and on solid efforts on combating trafficking. We particularly applaud the police raids on brothels, clubs, and bars and success in stopping clandestine speedboat traffic across the Adriatic. We now look to Albanian authorities to continue to develop and strengthen their fight against trafficking in persons, particularly by prosecuting traffickers, protecting witnesses, as well as working with other States on repatriation and rehabilitation programs to protect victims. Convictions of traffickers are almost impossible to obtain without the testimony of victims – this is often contingent on protection of the victims.

Finally Mr. Chairman, I would like to note my government's support of programs of both Albania and OSCE on Roma rights.

Thank you.